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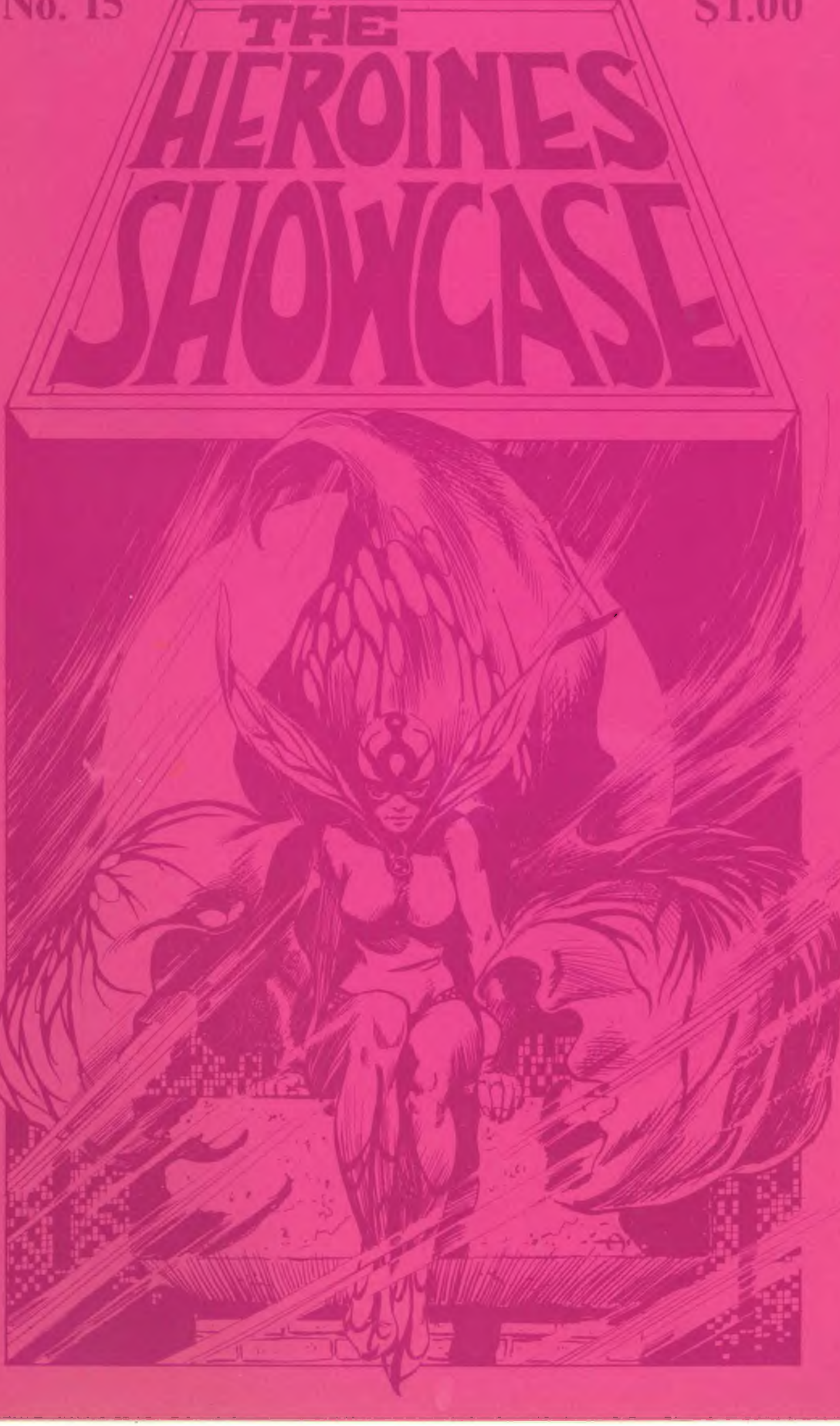
THE HEROINES SHOWCASE



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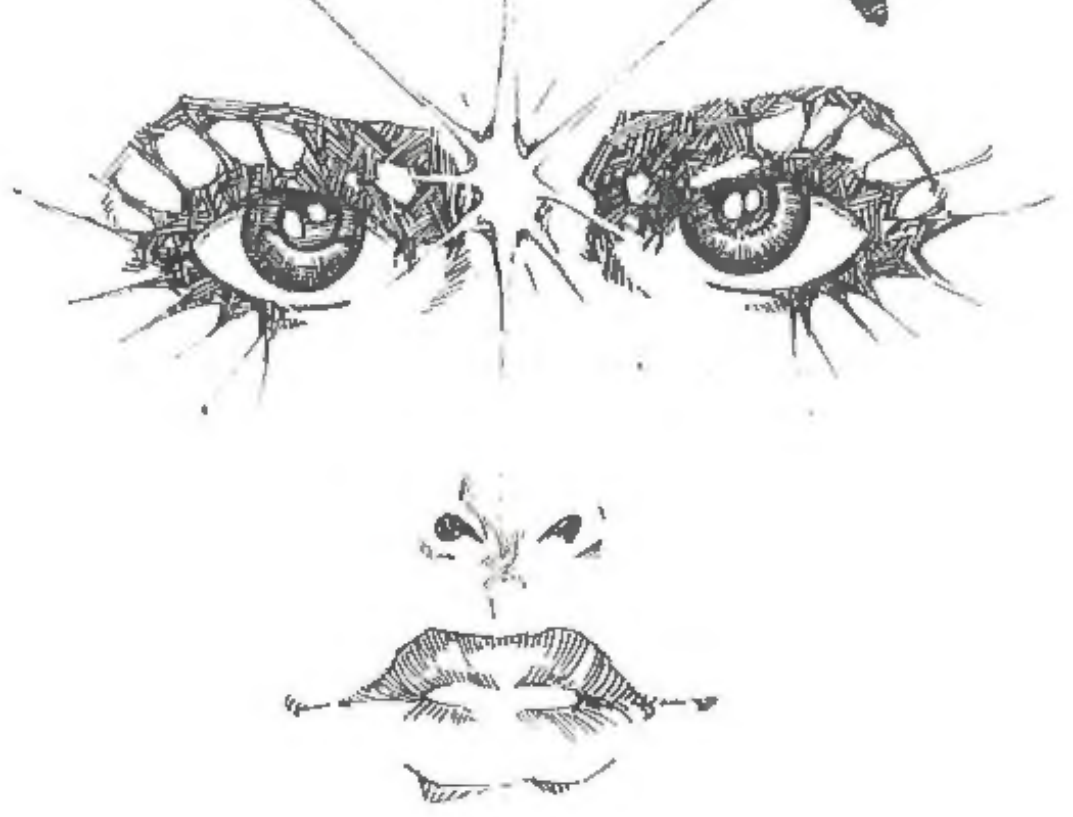
The Evolution of an Enchantress



by Cat Yronwode

Tonight as I write it's Samhain – Hallowe'en – an appropriate time to take pen in hand and recount the life history of a beautiful sorceress, a princess who left her home in a far-off world and lost her magic to follow the man she loved, a woman who fell from extra-dimensional enchantment to the relative normalcy of New York City's Greenwich village. Samhain is the feast-night of Our Lady of Darkness, Queen of the Dead, but in this age she is portrayed by ignorant children as a crazy lady on a broom – and like The White Goddess, Marvel's Mystic Maiden is but a shadow of her former self. This Samhain night the Moon is new. As it grows may the Goddess wax in power! As above, so below!

Clea is introduced in *Strange Tales* #126 as a beautiful unnamed denizen of the Dark Dimension. At least, I *think* she's beautiful – it's hard to tell with Steve Ditko women sometimes. Doctor Strange has been sent to the Dark Domain by his occult master, The Ancient One, to deal with Dormammu, a flame-headed demi-god whom both of them have frequently worshipped in times gone by, but who now threatens the safety of Earth in his mad lust for power. Clea, smitten with cosmic love at first sight for the handsome earthling, tries to warn Dr. Strange away in order to save his life, but the mystic naturally ignores her entreaties and goes on to confront the Dread One. By *Strange Tales* #127, we are faced with the fact that Clea, still unnamed and wearing a slightly different costume, is willing to do anything within her occult power to aid Dr. Strange, whom she loves in the peculiar and bizarre way which only women in comics, fairy tales, Victorian novels and Italian operas are capable of.

The human heart is complex. How sad it is that comics so often fail to show the human heart and give us simple stereotypes instead. Oh well, in 1964, at 12¢ a copy, it was cheap enough and I didn't really care if Clea's actions lacked both motivation and good sense. The art alone was sufficiently mindbending to render the personalities of the protagonists irrelevant.

Clea. Clea thinking she mustn't let any harm befall her Handsome Stranger. Clea flying

through a surrealistic landscape in wide-eyed determination, stealing an occult device from The Dread Dormammu's floating gizmo stash, running on her delicate little princess feet to the abode of The Mindless Ones. Clea risking her life to loose the terrible shambling cyclopean monsters upon her own homeland so that Dormammu must cease his battle with The Man She Loves. Ridiculous, yes – but only on the face of it. Inside each melodrama is a small and golden kernel of truth about the human heart. And that, in case you wondered, is why I *read* comics.

Clea's desperate tactic works almost too well. The Mindless Ones are so powerful that even the Dread Dormammu himself can't halt their rampage. In the end Dr. Strange must also lend his aid, thus earning the Dread One's promise to never enter Earth's dimension. This ends Clea's first encounter with the Mystic Master. Strange returns home without so much as a kiss for the woman who saved his lfie and his world. A kiss? Hell, he doesn't even ask her what her *name* is!

Of course Dormammu knows who has betrayed him so, by *Strange Tales* #136, Clea, who has changed her costume again, is "ensnared within the confines of a sinister spell." Steve Ditko is very fond of bondage scenes and as long as he drew the strip, Clea spent more time in various types of confinement than she did in freedom. Meanwhile, in order to initiate one of those patented Stan Lee revenge plots without breaking his promise to stay off Earth, Dormammu gives the wicked Baron Mordo power to fight for him. While Strange flees from Mordo and his minions, first on Earth and then on various other continua, the "helpless captive," Clea, is forced to watch his peril via interdimensional television. The "lovely prisoner" has changed her personality along with her costume this time. She is "fearful," has given up all hope, and, like the sole surviver of some doomed Greek Chorus, she cries out in horror as her Champion is forced to battle first the evil Mordo and then the enraged Dormammu. Her endurance is remarkable – she manages to keep the same look of wide-eyed terror on her face issue after issue as the fight drags on and on.

Needless to say, Our Hero wins the duel at last, in *Strange Tales* #141, but Dormammu has the last laugh. He contacts Dr. Strange on his astral video set, shows him the captive Clea and then, before Strange's astonished eyes, he hurls the "brave girl" into an unknown interdimensional void, where she languishes unseen for several issues, in spite of both The Ancient One's and Dr. Strange's attempts to find her. The conflict between Strange and Dormammu escalates until *Strange Tales* #146, when a galactic entity known as Eternity enters the fray. The Dread One, in a fit of hubris, leaps upon the interloper and to all appearances meets his fatal doom. The end of Dormammu has one peculiar side-effect – all his enchantments are undone at the moment of his disintegration, including the ones which have kept his victims trapped in cosmic prisons. Thus, after 10 issues, Clea, wearing a new costume, is free at last. Also at last, Dr. Strange learns the name of his devoted admirer. They part regretfully, hoping to meet again someday.

Not much of a heroine so far, is she, folks? Well, don't hold your breath.

With Dormammu out of the way, his sister, Umar the Unrelenting, takes over the Dark Domain. Her first act of power, shown in *Strange Tales* #150, is to capture poor Clea. "The hapless silver-haired female" (yes, she's wearing a new costume) is set adrift in an interdimensional vibrational barrier land and her cries for help are telepathically beamed to the Mystic Master. Like a Cecropia moth in rut, he responds to the scent-lure of the maiden's fear, and soon he is tangling with Umar on her own turf. At one point in the battle Umar decides to kill Clea – but Strange intercepts the spell (as if

a magic spell were a projectile!) and saves the Lady in Distress. At this point, Clea agrees to flee with her saviour to the relative safety of Earth. Because she is weak, Strange can't take her there by the normal means (whatever *those* are) and together they must traverse The Forbidden Dimensions. Clea's basic posture during this flight, well depicted by Marie Severin in *Strange Tales* #155, is one of utter gibbering breast-clutching panic. With the help of The Ancient One, the trans-dimensional travellers make it home in one piece, only to face one of the most unbelievably crude plot-twists Stan Lee has ever had the gracelessness to foist upon his doting public. The trip through the Forbidden Dimensions has proved to be too strenuous for Clea and she has fainted. Before she revives, before Dr. Strange can even ask her for a date (or vice versa), The Ancient One decides that, for her own safety, the alien woman must be cast forever into the Realm of Vanishment! The absurdity of Clea's avowed protector agreeing to jeopardize her life thus is compounded by the fact that neither of the sorcerers know how to recall a victim of this form of banishment – furthermore, they have not the vaguest idea about the nature of the dimension to which they are sending the unconscious woman. Worst of all, yet typically for comics of the period, **nobody ever asks Clea if she wants to submit to banishment!** Dr. Strange turns away in grief, The Ancient One reads a spell and – poof! – Clea is gone, not to be seen for another 17 months! This isn't even good (i.e. believable) plotting, much less a satisfactory reward for saving Dr. Strange's life. Plots like this have made comic books the laughing stock of the world of literature for years.

Dr. Strange's life during the ensuing months doesn't concern us here. Suffice it to say that he becomes romantically involved with Victoria Bentley, an Englishwoman who has also saved his life (way back in *Strange Tales* #114), he still remembers Clea, even while slogging through the jungle on an alien dimension. At length, after rescuing Victoria enough times to repay any debt he might owe *her*, Strange decides to retrieve Clea from the exile he and his mentor have inflicted upon her. It seems that one *can* get people out of the Realm of Vanishment, after all, as is shown in *Doctor Strange* #171. Strange coerces Victoria into accompanying him on this venture but, once in the otherworldly Realm, she freezes up in terror and refuses to move from the spot. Strange simply leaves her and, journeying on, encounters one danger after another, until at last he comes upon . . . Dormammu! The Dread One apparently landed here after he blew up in Eternity and, unable to leave, he has set up a little fiefdom, complete with demoniac Dykkors for servants and a couple of pretty captive women, one of whom is wearing (sigh) a new costume.

Women in fear. Women in bondage. Hapless, helpless, hopeless women. Guess who.

Dr. Strange frees Victoria and Clea and sends them back to Earth, following along after he disposes of Dormammu. At this point author Roy Thomas tailors the plot to fit artist Gene Colan's really exceptional talent for drawing love comics. – Victoria tearfully realizes that Dr. Strange loves Clea. She (sob) "always knew it would be this way." Choking back her sorrow, she returns to England. And Clea? Well, Clea rents an apartment in Greenwich Village.

I want to pause here for a moment. Narrating plot synopses is not the most compelling form of creative writing. Let's go back and consider Clea as a woman. Who is she? What have the authors told us about her so far? Is she "real" to you? Clea falls in love at first sight with a handsome magician. She risks her life to save his, stoically facing the inevitable reprisals which she knows will follow. Suddenly, a few short issues later, this once-courageous and willful woman is shrieking for help on the astral planes and clutching her bosom in panic, fainting dead away at the sight of a few surreal landscapes. What has *happened?* Why has Clea changed? If this were a novel, the outraged readers would demand an explanation. But *Strange Tales* is "only a comic book," "just a kid's story" – and the only explanation I can offer to satisfy my *own* outrage is that there is no "Clea," merely a staff of Marvel Comics scripters, each one using or abusing the character as they see fit. Stan Lee's plot first demands a Clea who is brave and daring, thus he writes about a brave and daring Clea. Later the action calls for a Damsel in Distress and so Clea becomes the necessary terrified ankle-clinger. The character is cut to fit the plot and not vice versa. Does this tell you anything about Clea? No, but it *does* tell you something about comics, I hope.

Fortunately, once Clea arrives on Earth (and therefore becomes a regular member of Dr.

Strange's supporting cast) her actions have to make sense. This period (*Doctor Strange* #172-183) is notable for the "realistic" treatment given to both art and story by Roy Thomas, Gene Colan and Tom Palmer. Strange and Clea are often seen in street clothes. Charming snow scenes and picturesque walks through the city abound. Clea's frightened personality (and her costume) are modified again. She is now seen as the Alien-Princess-in-a-Strange-Land. She has a playful disposition and an amusing short temper. Roy also attempts to rationalize the fact that the original Clea had been shown to possess magical powers before the onset of her fearful phase. He does this by stating that for some utterly unknown reason Clea's innate sorcerous ability is "fading" now that she had left her own dimension. This explanation is of course preposterous, because if magick was a function of staying at home, Dr. Strange would never have been able to carve out a heroic career on far-flung dimensions. Had Roy come up with some *mechanism* to explain Clea's failure, I might have believed he was doing more than promoting the usual sex-role stereotypes. As it is, Clea-the-Alien-Princess is too powerless to function as a heroine. She is simply one of those lovely female burdens most heroes are saddled with.

To tell the story of Lord Nekron and the Sons of Satannish (*Dr. Strange* #174-177) from Clea's point of view would not do it justice. In spite of the fact that the Mystic Maiden is little more than a kidnap victim and a hypnotized pawn, this multi-parter is one of the most tightly constructed episodes in Dr. Strange's history – that is, up until issue #177 when the Doctor is given a super-hero costume and the mood is irrevokably destroyed. I've *never* forgiven Roy and Stan for perpetrating this travesty, but it's been 10 years now and anyway, this is supposed to be an article about *Clea,* not about old wounds in my psyche. In subsequent issues, Clea continues to act like a charming alien pixie, not a heroine. She worries about her fading powers, lives alone in her apartment, and experiences snow for the first time. Thus matters stood when, without warning, *Dr. Strange* was cancelled with issue #183.

It was exactly 2 years before Clea's life-story was taken up again – unless one counts John Thompson's pirate underground comic, *Dr. Strenge* #184, which is unfortunately both rare and out of print. This tale, "Black Quasar," is told entirely from Clea's point of view. After all the changes her costume had been through in the authorized comics, it is rather refreshing to note that she neatly side-steps the problem here by appearing without any clothes at all. As for the plot of this bizarre little item – have you ever wondered how cancelled heroes spend their time in limbo? Well, to quote blues singer Georgia Tom Dorsey, "If ya don't know, I'll tell ya who do – just see Tampa Red and his best gal too – and they'll tell ya what tastes like gravy, boys, if ya really wanna know." 'Nuff said.

Dr. Strange's re-entry into the Marvel Universe occured in *Marvel Feature* (Defenders) #1. Shortly thereafter, he also began to star in *Marvel Premiere* (Dr. Strange), commencing with issue #3. Clea didn't appear in these first revival stories but when she did return, she subsequently played a role in both Strange's mainline continuity (*Marvel Premiere* #3-14 and *Dr. Strange* #1-up) and his "non-team" activities (*Marvel Feature* #1-3 and *Defenders* #1-up).

In *Marvel Premiere* #5, written by Gardner Fox, Clea is reintroduced to the public. Whatever other faults Fox may have as a writer, he certainly didn't waste any time putting Clea back into action. The story reads like an old DC comic as Clea (hyperbolically referred to as a "once-queen from another dimension") wakes up with a premonition (sent by Umar!) that Dr. Strange is in peril. She rushes to the Sanctum Sanctorum where she confers with Wong, casts a spell to repair the broken Orb of Agamotto, and then with Wong in tow, sets out to rescue her man, who is stranded in an evil New England village. No pixie, this. Clea-the-Sidekick is as efficient as Hawkgirl. A fading princess? Not on you Amulet! This New Improved Clea (with Wong as the Sidekick's Sidekick) blazes a trail through *Marvel Premiere* #5-7, aiding Dr. Strange in his battles against the sea-born servitors of Shuma-Gorath, racing from Starksboro, Vermont to Penmallow, Cornwall and finally on to Stonehenge itself for the ultimate confrontation. For the first time in 9 years, Clea is a heroine again! Of course, continuity buffs like me do tend to wonder how the near-helpless "fading" Clea managed to suddenly revert to her former courageous and resourceful self. Maybe the simplest explanation is that Gardner Fox is just an old-school no-nonsense comics author who believes that every hero

needs a good sidekick – but I prefer to think that Clea's little jaunt in *Dr. Strenge* #184 had something to do with her renewed self-confidence.

In any case, it didn't last.

Fannish digression: I'm one of those perverse souls who love to watch grade B science fiction movies with an eye for spotting faulty matte shots. Rather than diminishing my enjoyment of such films, this critical attitude actually *heightens* my pleasure. I can tell that real people worked hard to create the illusion when I can see a few minor imperfections in it. Fandom being what it is, I doubt that I need to justify my attitude on *these* pages. Spotting continuity flaws in comics is *fun* and you know that as well as I do, right? Right. Now it is common knowledge among comics readers that the first thing a new author does when he begins work on an old established strip is fiddle around with the supporting cast, often with ludicrous results. Steve Englehart, who took over *Marvel Premiere* with issue #8, is no exception. As much as I dislike what he did to the personality of Clea, I have to admit that I had a good laugh over the bald-faced way he did it. I mean, here's this powerful sorceress who has just flown across the Atlantic Ocean to take part in a perilous battle at Stonehenge, a battle of Earth-shaking importance on the astral planes and then . . . and then she turns to her oriental sidekick and tells him it's time to turn around and go "home, faithful one. This is to be a battle of masters . . . you and I would be of less import than rain on rock."

That's so transparent it deserves some kind of no-prize, don't you think?

Here's something else to ponder, folks: why do "old hacks" like Lee and Fox portray Clea (at least part of the time) as a hardy, capable woman while "sensitive hip young authors" like Thomas and Englehart see her as a powerless-but-decorative encumbrance? To give Englehart his due, he later did upgrade his treatment of Clea considerably, but for the entirety of his partnership with artist Frank Brunner (*Marvel Premiere* #8-14, *Dr. Strange* #1-5) the Mystic Maiden looked and acted about as powerful as Tinkerbell.

The Lover-Disciple Clea was introduced in *Marvel Premiere* #12. Dr. Strange has just had to murder his beloved mentor, The Ancient One. After this emotionally charged episode, he is meditating alone in the Mexican desert when Clea and Wong arrive in a rented jeep, having traced his mental emanations through the aethyr. Strange gives a beaufiful Carlos Castaneda-inspired speech about life and lizards which moves Clea to tears. They embrace as the sun sets, lovers in heart and in soul. Back home in New York City, Englehart subtly and sneakily finalizes their union by a clever trick: he simply never mentions Clea's apartment again. Henceforward she lives in Strange's sanctum, an arrangement which is given a legitimizing cover-story when the Master of the Mystic Arts takes her on as his disciple. The happy occult pair take to calling each other "darling" and "my love" and sneaking off-panel together for a bit of Tantrik relaxation. I found it amazing at the time that the usually puritanical Marvel office let this blatant shacking up go on under their noses, but now, 5 years later, such things are as commonplace in comics as they are in real life.

Englehart took time to make Clea-the-Disciple believable by showing her (in a newly modified costume) wistfully studying an occult tome in Dr. Strange's library. It is evident that the loss of her powers still bothers her. When Strange offers to retrain her in sorcery, she asks bitterly if he does so out of pity. His reply, a firm and rational statement of her worthiness, sets the tone for their subsequent relationship to date. From this time forward Clea is treated as a "real" character, not merely a combination love-interest and bondage pinup model – but

unfortunately, the character which has been finally settled upon is one who lacks self-confidence and who views her lover as an authority-figure.

In *Dr. Strange* #1-5 Clea reverts to her former role as a hypnotized kidnap victim and bondage model, this time to an ex-Catholic cardinal, the demonic Silver Dagger. However, this hoary old plotline is given a refreshing new twist – Strange can't rescue the damsel-in-distress because he is *dead*, and with his soul temporarily bereft of its body he is so disoriented that only by flowing into Clea's mind is he even able to survive. Clea, on the other hand, has been nearly broken by Silver Dagger's torture and lacks the strength to free herself. Only in union does the pair have both the power and the will to effect their escape – thus in the end they rescue *each* other. Once Strange recovers his body, the lovers fight side by side until the villain is vanquished. The Silver Dagger story is a real high point in the history of both Dr. Strange and Clea.

Dr. Strange #6-9 portrays Clea in an even more positive role. This sequence is also interesting because it displays to good advantage Steve Englehart's charming technique of reintroducing minor characters from long-past issues and presenting them in a new way. Unlike his work on *Detective Comics*, where he essentially rewrote some Batman stories from the early 1940's, this evocation of images from *Strange Tales* #127-155 is actually an original story in its own right. The action opens when Umar threatens Earth's safety once again and Dr. Strange asks Clea to travel with him to the Dark Dimension to investigate. Clea refuses to return to her homeland but won't explain why. Once Strange is gone, the Earth Spirit appears to Clea and implores her aid – something is growing inside her which should not be there, but more than that she cannot say. Using her "fledgling" powers, Clea journeys on the astral planes to the center of the Earth, where she is trapped by demons and discovers . . . Dormammu! The Dread One gives a very strange account of himself at this point, relevant because of what it later implies about Clea. He says he is "a concept, a shared belief . . . as long as others *worship* me, energy shall form itself to *become* me. The masses' cry of 'Dormammu' *is* Dormammu!"

Clea manages to escape, but meanwhile Dr. Strange has been overpowered by Umar (here, for the first time, referred to as a "goddess") and her servant Orini, chief disciple of Dormammu (who had a one-panel cameo in *Strange Tales* #132 but was not named at that time). The vanquished Doctor is drained of his sorcerous knowledge by the G'uranthic Guardian, another hitherto nameless Steve Ditko creation (from *Strange Tales* #127) and Orini is about to kill him when Clea arrives on the spot just in the nick of time to . . . to refuse to fight Orini because he is . . . her father! With Clea controlling Stephen's cloak of levitation, the pair flees to the relative safety of Clea's childhood hideout. Once there, she directs the now-helpless Dr. Strange in a pagan ritual which results in the Guardian transferring all of her master's erstwhile magicks into *her* mind. Thus armed, she overcomes Orini and his demon horde before relinquishing her power to its rightful host. The two return to Earth, where Dormammu has finally erupted, only to find himself betrayed by Umar. During the long and complex battle which follows, Clea once again wields Strange's powers, freeing the Earth Spirit while Strange acts as a decoy – but in the end it is the Earth herself who conquers the combined forces of Dormammu and Umar.

Doctor Strange #9 is certainly the most important story ever written about Clea because it forever altered her personality by giving her, at long last, an origin. It is revealed that Dormammu and Umar are only *half*-brother and sister, their father being one of the Flawless Flaming Faltine, a group of dieties first mentioned in *Strange Tales* #145. More importantly, the readers are let in on a fact unknown to anyone but Orini and Umar – Clea is the daughter of the Unrelenting One! Besides giving Clea a noble (albeit unacknowledged) pedigree, this information raises a delicate philosophical question. If the Faltinian "god" Dormammu is by his own admission a "concept" and if Umar is a half-human "goddess"/"concept," then Clea must be one quarter Faltine/"goddess"/"concept." Can you imagine a reality in which humans like Orini can mate with "concepts" and produce offspring? Odd, isn't it? At any rate, not only are Clea's short temper and her unruly hair adequately explained by her Faltinian ancestry, but so is her resemblance to Tinkerbell. Tinkerbell, as you might recall, was an embodied

concept too. We had to clap our hands to keep her alive in much the same way that Dormammu was kept alive by "the cry of the masses."

From issue #10 up to #28, Clea's persona (and her costume) remain fairly stable, but, instead of growing in strength from the experiences of *Doctor Strange* #1-9, she becomes slowly and steadily weaker. Her relationship with Dr. Strange deteriorates to that of child and parent, not two passionate lovers. When the Earth is destroyed and recreated in *Doctor Strange* #10-13, Strange confides his knowledge of his disturbing fact to a pair of visiting mystics but is reluctant to speak to Clea on the Subject for fear that she'll be unable to handle the shock. When James Mandarin sells out to Satan in *Doctor Strange* #15-16, Clea returns to her old hapless-captive-female-in-bondage routine. In a series of Bicentennial Battles (*Doctor Strange* #17-19), she makes a fool of herself by falling in lust with Benjamin Franklin. Steve Englehart left the book at this point but Marv Wolfman and Jim Starlin didn't do much better – Xander the Merciless renders Clea mindless in *Doctor Strange* #20 and she attacks the N.Y. C.P.D., turning them into swine. Once restored to sanity she stays home and minds the Sanctum while Strange spends the next several issues battling the Creators in another continuum.

Meanwhile, in the rather more prosaic pages of the *Defenders,* Dr. Strange's Sanctum is the "non-team's" New York City meeting place. Clea is often seen in the background there, watching television with the Hulk, drinking coffee with Valkyrie, and occasionally casting a spell or two when Dr. Strange is busy in another universe. Although her part in *Defenders* is a minor one, she has never been portrayed there (by Steve Gerber, David Kraft, et al) as fearful, unconfident or incompetent, which is more than can be said for the fate she endures in the pages of *Dr. Strange.* In *Defenders* #42 Dr. Strange's mind is sucked into an esoteric ruby called the Star of Capistan, turning the mage into a menacing messenger of Universal Peace. One by one, the male Defenders fall under his hypnotic spell, along with most of the inhabitants of New York City. In *Defenders* #45 it is Clea (aided on the physical plane by Valkyrie, Hellcat, and the Red Guardian) who saves the day by helping her mentor free himself from the confines of the sentient gem.

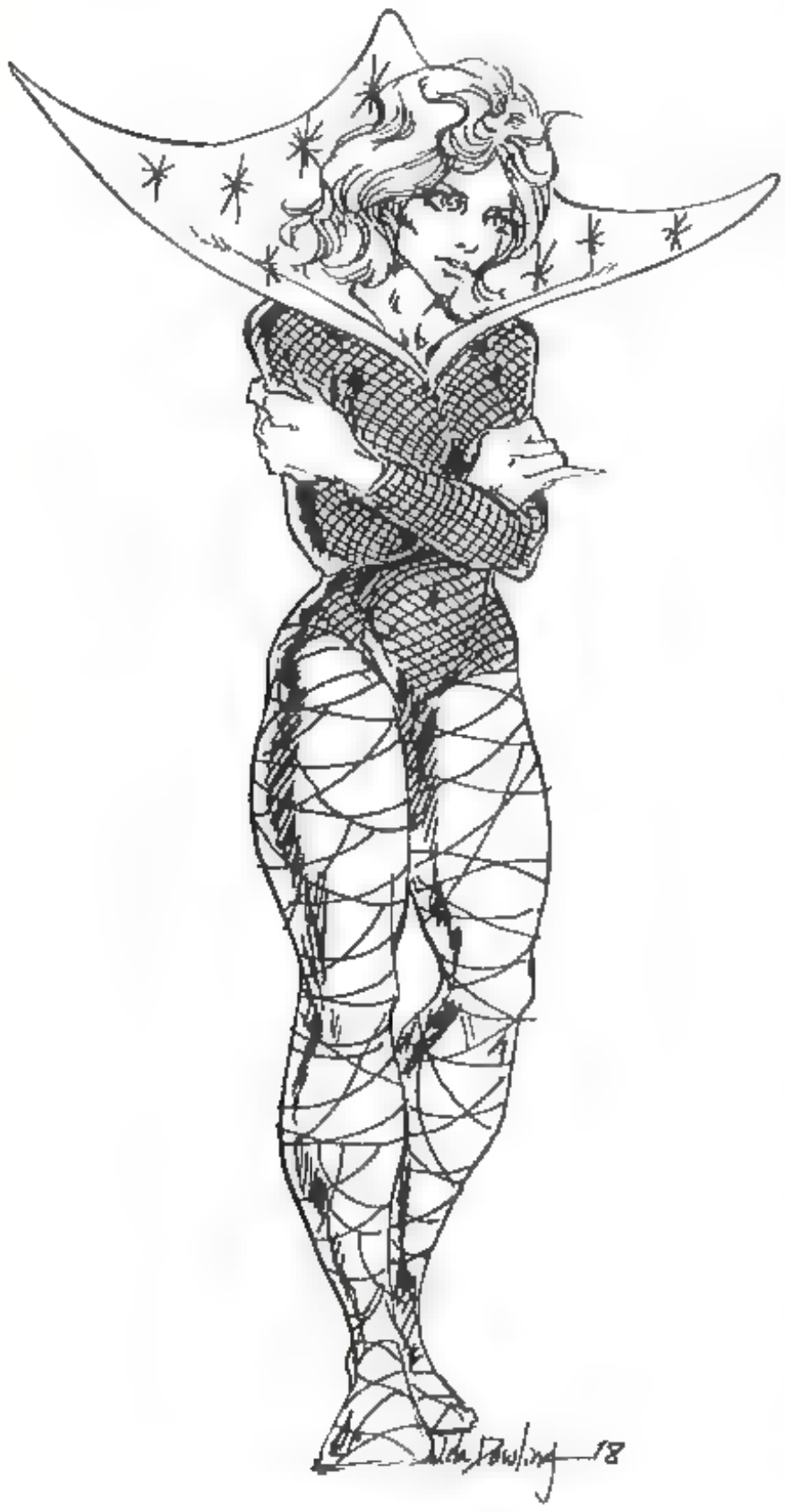
A 5 page backup feature in *Defenders* #53 is Clea's only solo story to date. While walking alone through Central Park one night, the Mystic Maiden is psychically mugged by a minor mage named Nicodemus who places her in an enchanged pentangle and drains all of her occult powers into himself. Undaunted by the loss of her magick (she ought to be used to it by now), she resourcefully bashes him over the head with a piece of statuary and calls Stephen on the telephone to come and straighten things out. This thoroughly delightful short story was written by Naomi Basner and illustrated by Sandy Plunkett and Tony Salmons. I hope there will be others to follow in the same vein.

When Roger Stern and Tom Sutton took over *Dr. Strange* with issue #27, they immediately revised Clea again. Her costume hasn't been the same for two issues in a row since that time, what with an experimentally added cape, a sleeveless tank-top which has given way to a halter, and even a few complete changes from leotards and tights to various diaphanous long gowns which, like Umar's, are slit to the thighs. These outward manifestations actually reflect an inward development in Clea's character. In *Dr. Strange* #29, the Doctor leaves her at home while he helps Nighthawk battle Deathstalker. Clea becomes violently angry at this treatment and confronts Strange with her grievance in issue #30. Her resemblance to Umar is uncanny as she accuses her mentor of being so lovingly protective that he's failing to *teach* her anything. Strange capitulates at once and apologizes. This issue sees Clea casting her own rhymed spells for the first time in years (outside of *Defenders*) but at the crucial moment of conflict, she succumbs to her old nemesis, *fear,* and has to be talked out of her terror by Dr. Strange. However, once she calms down, they do fight as a team, even casting a joint spell together. *Dr. Strange* #31-33 shows more of the same – the sorcerer and his apprentice cast a number of spells together and fight side by side, but Clea's lack of self-confidence and her recurrent fearfullness tend to hamper her effectiveness in battle.

The theme of Clea as Umar's daughter is combined with the image of the kidnapped Clea in *Marvel Team-Up* #76-77. Captured again by Silver Dagger, the Mystic Maiden is transformed into a cruel Dormammu-like energy-form intent upon destroying Dr. Strange. Author Chris

Claremont refers to this as "the Clea who might have been — had she been raised as her mother's daughter." The idea is intriguing — no one else has really explored Clea's Faltine heritage – but by the end of the tale we are left with a whimpering girl-child Clea who is being comforted by loving Daddy Strange.

As this synopsis of her character shows, Clea is a manic-depressive heroine, perhaps a schizophrenic. Granddaughter of some of the Omniverse's most powerful forces, daughter of a ruthless extra-dimensional goddess, raised as a princess by an authoritarian sorcerer, she is subject to unaccountable and irrational bouts of terror during which she doubts her own abilities and even her capacity for survival. In some ways her relationship to Dr. Strange is a transference of her frustrated desires to please her stern unloving father, but when she is in a confident or playful mood she can be as willful and as proud as her mother. Because Clea is not a full-fledged heroine in her own right, but merely a sidekick, her personality has only rarely been explored beyond the superficial "action" levels most comic book authors are content to deal with. Clea's schizophrenic behavior *could* be regarded as a sign of her bizarre genetic makeup, but I fear the truth is much simpler than that — too many writers have worked their will on the character.



The Clea of today, while not the woman she *might* have been, is much stronger than she has been in years. I hope, now that Ralph Macchio has taken over the scripting chores on *Dr. Strange,* that she will continue to grow in power. Most comic book authors are men and I believe that their concept of heroines is a direct reflection of their current attitude toward the women they love or toward women in general. This is not a condemnation of male authors I do not feel, as some feminists critics do, that only women are capable of writing heroine titles — but it *is* something to think about, particularly if one is a female reader and one wonders why a character changes so often and so drastically. Male authors seem to base their heroes on their own fantasized selves. Again, this is obervation, not condemnation. But the fact remains that one is rarely hurt, angered or frustrated by *oneself,* while the chances that one will experience these emotions at the hands of the opposite sex at one time or another are virtually *certain.* The reflection of such events in an author's writing are, in my opinion, responsible for a lot of the inconsistancies surrounding most heroines in comics. A man at ease with women may write a good heroine yarn but, until there are more *women* writing comics, we are unlikely to see very many internally coherent or emotionally stable heroines. Clea may be an extreme example of the schizophrenically inconsistant heroine but, sadly, she is by no means unique.

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IAN

CLUB NEWS by Nick Chinn

It's been a hectic schedule between club and personal/business matters, but here we are again with another issue of THS.

First, our apologies to our subscribers for the delay in mailing of *The Adventuress* #8. Deadline and production problems made the issue three weeks late so we decided to mail it out with this issue (THS #15) and save the club about $25.00 in postage and mailing costs.

There has been a warm response to Stan Giesea's pencil portrait of Farrah which appeared in THS #12 (if you don't have it, order it!). We are pleased to present a second piece from Stan's portfolio. We've also got him working on a couple of other drawings, which will further detract him from his aspiring acting career.

Missing Subscribers Dept. - We still need to re-establish contact with these club members who still have money in their accounts and we'd like to send them the 'zines they already paid for. If YOU can help us, please do so. YOU may be our only chance to reach these people: R. Michael Griswold (Houston, TX); Jerald Magid (Los Angeles, CA); Wes Smith (Paw Paw, MI); and John P. Wentworth (Alhambra, CA).

In response to a brief review of THS #14 in *Hola* #3 regarding the use of pro artwork in a fanzine – Using covers by Steve Leialoha for THS #14 does *not* make THS any less of a FANzine than others. There is no reason that a comics pro cannot also be a fan. Some of them still collect comics, and many of them still do work for fanzines . . . for example, our own Brent Anderson has done stories for Marvel, DC and Charlton (publication pending) and portions of recent issues of *Avengers* and *Spider-Woman* were inked by Brent (on an uncredited basis). Brent has done 15 installments of "Saddle Tales," a strip appearing in *Horse Lovers Magazine*, and has become a regular illustrator for *Peninsula Magazine*. But he still makes time, in addition to a full-time job with a local graphics house, to do illustrations for us on a *fan* basis.

BRENT ANDERSON

On the same subject, Frank Thorne did the inside front cover of THS #13 especially for the club, with the piece recently reprinted in the Conan treasury edition. Frank did the work for us on purely a fan basis. Neither Leialoha, Thorne or Anderson have been paid for their time. Lela Dowling is also an up and coming professional illustrator. The point is, just because we are dubbed a FANzine doesn't mean that pro artwork is verboten in these pages. And precedent wasn't broken because pro art *had* appeared before THS #14. Goodness, I'm not looking for an argument, just trying to clear the issue. I hate to deal with terms - otherwise fans would have to classify every publication in fandom differently: fanzine, semi-fanzine, prozine, semi-prozine, benzine . . .

Lela has expressed interest in doing another strip on the Cheshire Cat, which debuted in *The Adventuress* #6 (if you don't have it, order it!!). A second issue of *The Heroine Addict Art Portfolio* is being planned, featuring Lela's artwork. Is everyone excited?

In continuation of a long-standing policy, subscriptions to the CHFC Staff Bulletin are available to all CHFC subscribers. The cost is 5¢ per page plus 15¢ postage – it is deducted from your regular CHFC account. If you want to know what is going on behind the scenes and want to see previews of upcoming features, the Staff Bulletin is a good thing to have. And if you are interested in becoming a contributor or staff member, it will familiarize you with our deadlines and club policies. Write to Steve if you're interested.

(continued on page 33)

A Review

THE LAST WIZARD and RED SONJA SHOW

by G. Hosting

The first, last, and final Wizard & Red Sonja Show took place Saturday afternoon at the 1978 San Diego Comic Con. It brought with it superlative reviews from the East Coast, and for this first and only West Coast appearance, the closing engagement was not to disappoint the audience.

The crowd was admitted until 3 o'clock when the doors were shut to insure there were no interruptions or distractions. Instructions were given that everyone was to remain seated for the duration of the 30 minute show, and there would be no smoking or flash photography allowed.

An impromptu and amateurish introduction given by an older woman fan got the show started very awkwardly, but as the lights dimmed and the Wizard appeared on stage, the magic began.

Menef the Wizard delivered an impressive introduction to the Hyborian Age, its gods, and the whispered legends of the great swordswoman, Red Sonja! A single spotlight focused on the Wizard and the shadow it etched began to set the mood, but it took some time before the audience realized that the plastic beer mug clutched by the Wizrd was supposed to be a tankard of ale.

Incantations were invoked and Red Sonja began to be drawn from the distant past to the Wizard's abode via the central aisle. The mood is almost destroyed as Sonja's form disrupts the visual graphics being projected. Not until she reaches the stage and comes into full view does the agitated audience realize that it was not some inconsiderate person out of their seat.

The show flows smoothly through the Wizard's ascertaining that this is the real Sonja and her initial attack on him. They share a drink and Sonja voices her challenge to the predetermenation of women's subservant role, the thrill of battle, the power of the sword, and her vow to live a warrior's life.

The mood is perfect when the shattering voice from hell fills the room and lays claim to Sonja's soul. Sonja battles a demon sent by the voice in an effective multi-media presentation, while the simpering wizard withdraws to the side.

Sonja celebrates her victory over the demon with a dance backed up with slides featuring Pini art, reversals of some Thorne comic panels, and an incredible sequence where a unicorn seems to prance forward from the screen and join Sonja.

The Wizard prepares to return Sonja to her own time while she skeptically looks on. A carefully cued wind-down of the audio to a stop pronounces the Wizard's failure. "It looks like you'll be here for the con" conceeds the Wizard. "And rub elbows with these knaves, varlets and dogs? By Erlick, I think I'll be right at home!" declares Sonja.

There is no denying that this was a professional stage show. Thorne and Pini knew how to perform in front of a microphone and exchange it without making the audience aware of its presence.

Throughout the show the audio, superb visual effects, and lighting manned by Richard Pini are perfectly synched to the show. Only during Sonja's dance are the lights a little too dim to allow the audience to clearly see the performers.

Allowing the audience to filter in until 3:00, securing the doors, and maintaining a tight security showed that Pini and Thore were quick to take a lesson from the fiasco at the masquerade contest the night before.

It is not hard for this writer to see that the show was truly a labor of love for the Pini's and Thorne's, inasmuch as *this* fanzine is a labor of love. The return on the enormous amount of work that goes into such work is at best minimally acknowledged, but most of the time completely overlooked.

Eventually the continued drain on time and energy brings things to a conclusion and the people involved turn their efforst in new directions. The CHFC extends its best wishes to the Pini's in their production of "Elfquest," and Frank Thorne as he pursues new outlets for his art. This bright end to the Wizard & Red Sonja Show will *not* be forgotten.

THE HEROINE REVUE

THE SECRET LIVES OF Betty Cooper

an exposé by Scott Gibson

Citing blond, pony-tailed Betty Cooper, sometimes girlfriend to Archie Andrews, as the subject of this column is straying about as far from the mainstream of super-heroinedom as you can get. But the character did have a brief heyday as both a costumed crimefighter and a super-spy type, beginning in the fall of 1965. The adventure of both incarnations were tongue-in-cheeck and definitely lightweight material, but Ms. Cooper otherwise met all of the standard requirements for qualifying as a bona fide adventuress. So, herewith is a look at her alter-egos . . . The Secret Lives of Betty Cooper.

SUPERTEEN

Superteen bowed in the pages of *Betty and Veronica* #118 (October, 1965). The story, "Just Imagine," saw Betty fantasizing about being a costumed, super-powered do-gooder. But this six-pager featured no evil-doers or cosmic menaces; merely Superteen vying with Veronica for Archie's attentions. This was, after all, just Betty's imagination! But her subsequent expoits were "real," so to speak — no more dreams or fantasies — and they generally featured more vile and despicable antagonists than Veronica Lodge. Villains like The Consumer (from the planet Dispersia, he was able to devour anything which got in his way!), Magnet-Girl, Mad Doctor Doom, and, of course, Evilheart (in reality, Archie's rival, Reggie Mantle) met defeat at Superteen's hands.

Betty and Me #3 (August, 1966) offered ST's origin tale. On a picnic, Archie was showing off by balancing precariously on a cliff's edge. He fell off, but landed on a narrow ledge several feet below, knocking himself unconcious. Betty climbed down to him, but her added weight caused the ledge to break away. Her ponytail caught on a small bush and was twisted. The captions took it from there: "Maybe it was the super human desire and determination to save the one she loved, but suddenly . . . (a flash of light) . . . Superteen was born!" From there, it was just seconds before she had Archie back on safe ground. "Danger past, (she) reverts to Betty." Ironically, no one saw the heroine in action, and the crowd mistakenly thought that Archie had somehow saved Betty. Only Jughead knew better . . .

From then on, it was established that all Betty needed do was to twist her ponytail, charged with "electrons that give her strength, courage and power to fly!" (from *Betty and Veronica* #119, November, 1965).

Superteen's outfit varied from time to time. Early adventures saw her clad in red tights with blue boots and trunks and the letters ST emblazoned across her ah, maidenly bosom. Later, the ST emblem was encircled by a white heart and a white cape was added. Minor modifications were frequent: *red* cape, *blue* blouse, *white* boots, white belt and trim, etc., etc.

The pinnacle of her career was probably in *Life With Archie* #50 (June, 1966), a book-lengther in which Superteen teamed with Pureheart (archie) and Captain Hero (Jughead) to form, a la Justice League, *The United Three.* But this alliance was not repeated, nor ever even mentioned again.

A Log of Superteen's Cases

October, 1965	*Betty and Veronica*	#118	"Just Imagine"
November, 1965	*Betty and Veronica*	#119	"Dinner For One"
April, 1966	*Life With Archie*	#48	"Mad Dr. Doom's Dupe" (cameo in Pureheart story)
June, 1966	*Life With Archie*	#50	"Doorway To Terror" (with Pureheart and Captain Hero)
August, 1966	*Betty and Me*	#3	"It All Began . . . " (origin story) "Superteen Strikes Again"
October, 1966	*Betty and Me*	#4	"Maid of Mischief" "Danger Is Where You Find It"
October, 1966	*Archie Giant Series*	#142	(Reprint of *Betty & Veronica* #119)
December, 1966	*Jughead as Captain Hero*	#2	"Attack of The Monster Machines" (cameo in Captain Hero story)
December, 1966	*Betty and Me*	#5	"To The Rescue"
February, 1967	*Betty and Me*	#6	"Food Demon"

The Girl From R.I.V.E.R.D.A.L.E.

A.R.C.H.I.E. as The Man From R.I.V.E.R.D.A.L.E. (parodying guess-what-TV-series!) was a fixture in *Life With Archie* from #45 to #63 (skipping just a couple of the early issues). Betty and the rest of the gang were usually involved in these adventures, but only Ms. Cooper graduated to her *own* strip, The Girl From R.I.V.E.R.D.A.L.E. (parodying guess-what-spin-off-of-what-series!). B.E.T.T.Y. and her fellow agents worked for P.O.P. (Protect Our Planet), and operated out of Pop's Choklit Shop.

Although B.E.T.T.Y. wore no super-costume in this role, she was armed to the teeth with weapons and derring-do enough to make any super-secret agent proud. And the foes she faced were no less colorful and bizarre than Superteen's Rogues' Gallery. They included Super Spy, The Whistler, Flamethrower and the Birdman. And even with all of her gadgetry, B.E.T.T.Y. had ample opportunity to display her prowess at karate, judo and general rough-up of the bad guys.

No origin was ever offered for A.R.C.H.I.E. or B.E.T.T.Y. or P.O.P. or any part of the series; but then, none was needed. The whole gimmick worked primarily because it was so offbeat. Any sense of menace or danger was purely imaginary – B.E.T.T.Y. and her fellow agents were almost invariably rescuing Veronica's father's business, Lodge Enterprises, from a gallery of the most offbeat threats imaginable.

The Missions of the Girl From R.I.V.E.R.D.A.L.E.

October, 1966	*Life With Archie*	#54
	"Who Screams Last . . . Screams Best"	
November, 1966	*Life With Archie*	#55
	"Whistle Bait"	
December, 1966	*Life With Archie*	#56
	"Flame of Fear"	
January, 1967	*Life With Archie*	#57
	"Flight of The Fiend"	
February, 1967	*Life With Archie*	#58
	"Sands of Doom"	
April, 1967	*Betty and Me*	#7
	"The Chopstick Parade"	
June, 1967	*Betty and Me*	#8
	"Playthings of Peril"	
October, 1967	*Betty and Me*	#10
	"Too Frail for the Trail"	

Alas, after these exciting days, Betty reverted back to an average teenager, wherein, all things considered, she has enjoyed her greatest success of all.

Rudi Franke

©MAY 1978

MISS AMERICA

"The Mystery of the Shocker" - *14 pgs.*

Miss America Magazine V.1 #2 - *Nov. 1944*

Golden Age Girls

by Steve Johnson

"Miss America, really, is Madeline Joyce, a sweet-faced normal 16 year-old girl who lives with her kindly uncle, well-to-do James Benton. One day, while visiting her uncle's friend, a brilliant scientist-inventor, Madeline, not yet endowed with her extraordinary powers, goes into the inventor's den. During this visit, an electrical storm fills the heavens. Madeline, trapped in a high voltage cabinet, falls unconscious. Following her revival, and while driving along in her car, she chanced upon criminals attacking defenseless citizens. Outraged, she jumped out of the car and — miraculously, discovered that she could perform super-human feats. Thus Miss America came into being.

"But please remember, as you follow the adventures of Miss America that nobody but you knows the true identity of this remarkable crime fighter; only you know she is Madeline Joyce as she assumes the role of Miss America, Champion of Justice in The Mystery of the Shocker!"

Three o'clock, and Madeline Joyce is hurrying to the bank to deposit her uncle's war bonds in the bank's vault before it closes. The guards allow her to enter as they begin to secure the door.

As she fills out a deposit slip, a strange man with a dead white face passes by, and Madeline has a feeling of revulsion as if sensing some evil presence.

The strange man proceeds to rob the bank. Challenged by the guards he throws down his gun and then chars the guards with great blinding forks of lightening.

Stunned by the weird electrical charge, Madeline fights to clear her head and then pursues the fleeing Shocker in her own car. He loses her in the traffic, but she takes to the air as Miss America and regains his trail as he arrives at a deserted dock and dives into the water. Miss America waits. Ten minutes pass and the Shocker does not resurface.

Later at police headquarters, Miss America is arguing against the theory that the Shocker drowned when a report of another robbery comes in! Straight as a crow zooms Miss America towards the river's edge. And the Shocker is again diving into the water. Miss America pursues him, and then escapes death by the narrowest of margins when she realizes the water is no place to battle a creature who is more electric eel than man.

Once out of the water and safe from the Shocker, Miss America decides to change back to Madeline as she puzzles over the strange pattern of events.

Costume: Red with blue cape, black belt with gold buckle, red, white & blue chest and cap emblem
Hair: Black

A trip to the Dept. of Docks and Harbors uncovers an abandoned tunnel entrance near the Shocker's escape route. Madeline races to the site, overcomes a guard at the entrance, and swiftly changes into her fighting costume as she moves along the abandoned tunnel towards a gleam of light.

At the end she finds the Shocker's laboratory. Unable to resist temptation to capture the Shocker single-handed, Miss America moves forward to attack when without turning his head, the Shocker acknowledges her presence. Changing from his laboratory garb, the Shocker entertains Miss America with the secret of his strange power.

Finished with his explaination, the Shocker attempts to stun Miss America so he can place her in a huge tank with the source of his powers, two giant electric eels. Miss America takes to the air to avoid his electrical attack.

Feigning unconsciousness from hitting her head against the high earth ceiling, Miss America drops to the floor. As the Shocker picks her up and moves towards the tank of eels, Miss America delivers a blow to his chin with her knee.

Stunned by the blow, the Shocker makes a desperate but feeble attempt to recall his powers. Calling on all her power in one supreme effor, Miss America lifts the Shocker into the air and over the edge of the tank with one blow. And unconscious, the Shocker is no more match for the eels than any other human being.

At $30 and up, this comic/magazine is not likely to find its way into the hands of many heroine fans, but the story is well drawn and well written (probably by Otto Binder who created the character and worte most of her adventures).

What makes this issue unique is that it is the first issue of *Miss America Magazine*, "a magazine devoted exclusively to all things of vital interest to teen-age girls" and as issue V.1 #2 takes its numbering from the *Miss America Comics* (#1) one-shot. It features a photo cover with a young girl, Miss Dolores Conlon, in a Miss America costume, the 14 page Miss America story, articles, fiction and fashions for teen-age girls, and for the super-avid Hellcat fans, the introduction of Patsy Walker in a seven page strip.

The magazine ran through #98 (1957) but apparently Miss America wasn't among the things of "vital interest to teen-age girls" as her feature was dropped after issue #5, though Patsy Walker continued to appear.

Miss America Comics #1 is (supposedly) in the same price range, and is a much better value than #2 as it has three Miss America stories, 17, 15 and 12 pages respectively, if that outweighs the other features of #2.

Originally Miss America had the power of flight, x-ray vision, great strength, and the wisdom of the ages, but by 1947 she had lost everything except her flying ability and had gained a pair of glasses.

Miss America achieved lasting fame as the only female member of the All Winners Squad in their two original adventures though she amassed only 10 pages of solo story in her 2 chapters of these adventures, the least of any member.

Since her first reappearance in *Giant-Size Avengers* #1 in 1974 (but set in the 1940's and 50's), Miss America has been portrayed with brown hair, perhaps to add credence to the fact that she and The Whizzer were revealed as the parents of the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver in

this issue. Flashbacks in this story show her with glasses in both *All Winners* #19 and #21 while she actually didn't don the glasses until *All Winners* #21.

Her brown hair has continued to present in her appearances with the Liberty Legion, but the glasses do not reappear until *What If* #4 where she is shown wearing them only after the end of WWII (which coincides with the actual Golden Age pattern). Her belt manges to change from black to blue, and her beret has become a skull cap.

Miss America's future (past) doesn't look very bright (she died after giving birth to Wanda and Pietro). It's too bad that the planned Liberty Legion book never came about, but maybe Roy Thomas has other plans in store for this lady.

Probably no one has noticed, even those I've told, but this is the first time in eight installments of "Golden Age Girls" that I have featured a second heroine from any given comic book company. This is not to say that I'm running out of companies, as the Golden Age has to be noted for the multitude of companies producing comics. But that I haven't secured some of the material I felt I needed to write about some of these other heroines.

Future installments of GAG will feature heroines from some of the other companies (DC, Harvey, Nedor, MLJ, Dynamic, Charlton, Fawcett, Fox, Ajax) and repeat some of the companies I have already covered (Timely, Hillman, Quality, EC, Holyoke, Fiction House, Avon).

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Miss America, "The Scourge of the Nazis," appeared in:

All Select #11 (Fall 1946)

All Winners #19,21 (Fall 1946, Win. 1946/47)
w/ All Winners Squad; cover app. #19,21

Blonde Phantom #12-14 (Win. 1946/47 - Fall 1947)

Fantasy Masterpieces #10 (Aug. 1967)
rpt. All Winners #19; cover app.

Giant-Size Avengers #1 (Aug. 1974)
w/ Avengers & All Winners Squad (flashbacks)

Invaders #6 (May 1976)
w/ Liberty Legion & Invaders; cover app.

Marvel Mystery #49-85 (Nov. 1943 - Feb. 1948)
origin #49-50; 10 chapter serial #76-85

Marvel Premiere #29,30 (Apr., June 1976)
w/ Liberty Legion & Invaders #29,30; cover app. #29,30

Marvel Super-Heroes #17,18 (Nov. 1968, Jan. 1969)
rpt. All Winners #21

Marvel Two-In-One #20 (Oct. 1976)
w/ Thing & Liberty Legion

Marvel Two-In-One Annual #1 (1976)
w/ Thing & Liberty Legion; cover app.

Miss America Comics #1 (1944)
cover app.; 3 stories

Miss America Magazine V.1 #2-5 (Nov. 1944 - Feb. 1945)
cover app. #2 (young girl in costume); 2 stories #3

Sun Girl #1 (Aug. 1948)

What If #4 (Aug. 1977)
w/ All Winners Squad; cover app.

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Steven R. Johnson, P.O. Box 1329, Campbell, CA 95008

TIGER GIRL

BY TRINA ROBBINS

Tiger Girl was Fiction House's attempt to cash in on the popularity of their jungle girl star, Sheena. That she was in many ways better was due to the superb drawing of Matt Baker, who drew the red haired jungle princess from her first story in 1945 until his untimely death in 1949.

Tiger Girl first appeared in *Fight* #32. At first she occupied the back of the book. The lead story and cover where devoted to Senorita Rio, the Brazilian spy drawn by Lily Renee, one the two women cartoonists employed by Fiction House. Unlike Sheena in her tree house, Tiger Girl lived in a secret temple built by her father, the Rajah Vishnu, with her pet tigers Togara and Benzali, who didn't seem to mind that she wore a two piece bathing suit fashioned from the skins of their brothers. With her also is her faithful Sikh Abdola, who refers to her as "little princess."

How the red haired Indian princess Vishnu came to live in the African jungle is explained in *Fight* #51. By this time Tiger Girl has the cover and lead story, which begins with Tiger Girl and Abdola throwing out fish nets in a peaceful setting. Suddenly they see a plane in the sky and Abdola senses evil. On the plane an Indian and Shane, a typical white hunter type, discuss Tiger Girl. The Indian tells her her origin story, which is shown in flashbacks;

"Years ago, the Rajah Vishnu came here from India, sorrowing over the death of his Irish mate . . . With him came his only daughter, much wealth, and his trained Bengal tigers . . . and as time passed . . . "The young Tiger Girl, in Indian garb, is saying, "The striped ones obey my every word, Sahib." To which her father replies, " 'Tis well, my daughter, and I shall make this hidden glade safe for thy beauty." However, the Rajah gets killed by a lion. The Indian continues, "With her Sikh servant the princess remained here. None have found her abode though the Swahilis see her often . . . "

The Indian and Shane capture Abdola and torture him to get him to reveal the hidden wealth of the Rajah Vishnu, but he is saved by Tiger Girl, riding an elephant and leading a whole herd of animals, who dispatch the bad guys. In the last panel Tiger Girl says, "You spoke of my father's wealth, Abdola . . . I know it not." And Abdola explains, "The Rajah's

TIGER GIRL

BY ALLAN O'HARA

THROUGH TENSE JUNGLE AIR HURTLED A MENACE FROM A FARAWAY LAND AND ANOTHER AGE, AN AGE OF GREED AND BLOODSHED. AND THE WARNING DRONE THAT BORE THIS OGRE WENT UNHEEDED BY TIGER GIRL AS . . .

IF THOU WOULD EAT FISH, LEND AID HERE, ABDOLA.

HARK, TIGER GIRL... THAT SOUND...

wealth built thy temple . . . a temple of peace."

However, Tiger Girl's writer, Alan O'Hara (a house name) was not always consistant, if indeed he was even always the same writer. In *Fight* #43, there really *is* a treasure in Tiger Girl's hidden temple. #43 also features Tiger Girl's sacred ring. ("One gaze and the wearer gathers superhuman strength . . . ") This gimmick was also used in #39 ("One look at the tiger ring endows Tiger Girl with abnormal strength . . . ") and by #58 had become an amulet, used, as in the previous stories, to give her strength to break the bonds with which she was tied. ("Must snap these vine cords! My amulet will give me strength! . . . Ah . . . They loosen . . . ") When the ring and/or amulet was not needed to get Tiger Girl out of a tight spot, the artist simply forgot about them and drew her without them.

By 1949 two things happened that meant the end for the beautiful Tiger Girl, although in an altered form she hung on through 1950. The first seems to have been a pre-Wertham attempt at self-censorship. Suddenly all the women in Fiction House comics were covered from neck to below the knees. Even the jungle heroines wear bulkier bathing suits, and Tiger Girl's two piece tiger skin gets two thick straps at the shoulders and two more connecting the top to the bottom.

The other factor was the death of Matt Baker. Tiger Girl in *Fight* #60 is still drawn by him, but by #63, she has been taken over by some unknown house artist and the Fire is gone.

Although Fiction House had many fine artists working for them, including Bob Lubbers, Lee Elias, George Evans and Graham Engles, to me Matt Baker personified the Fiction House style, and I won't touch a post 1948 Fiction House comic.

Trina Robbins

Complaints Department

IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU FEEL ABOUT A HELLCAT — FORGET IT!

by Deby Dunn

Even though she is a reincarnation of an earlier, now-dead woman, the Hellcat has been one of the most interesting new heroines in recent years. Since her creation by writer Steve Englehart in *Avengers* #144, Patsy Walker has brought a new, unique approach to super-heroing.

For one thing, she dreamed all her life of being a super-hero. This is unusual. Even most male heroes didn't want to be heroes when they were young, they either were born with their powers (mutants) or got powers through freaky, and usually painful accidents. The same is true of most super-villains.

Patsy brough the naive ideas of her youth with her to her new career. "Oh, boy! That was just like Spider-man!" she thinks to herself in the middle of a melee at the Brand Corporation (*Avengers* #149). Perhaps it was because Patsy treated heroing as a delightful, new game that Moondragon would not allow her to join the Avengers, and required her to have some training on Titan instead.

If this is the case, Moondragon failed in her effort to show Patsy what heroing was really about because Hellcat learned about pain the hard way in *Defenders* #50, when she was mauled by Leo, the Lion. In #51, "Val, it *hurts.* Being a super-heroine is supposed to be *fun,* know what I mean? But this still hurts . . . awful bad."

In some ways, Hellcat is much like the original Wasp. She is young, attractive, and enthusiastic. This make her a difficult character to write well, for it is terribly easy for her to fall into a formula reminiscent of the first appearance of Boopsie, a cheerleader in G.B. Trudeau's syndicated daily comic strip, "Doonesbury." Boopsie's inperishable first words were, "Whee! Tee-hee! Giggle! Hi there!"

Steve Englehart handles Hellcat very well indeed, by balancing her light heart with Buzz Baxter, an ex-husband whom she divorced when he turned crooked ("You *disgust* me, Buzz Baxter! You turned out so *rotten!*") even though he was the only man she ever loved. The pain of what Buzz did to her and to their marriage suddenly made Patsy seem a mature woman indeed, one much like the Jan Pym we later saw in the Avengers, when her husband went insane.

Unfortunately, Dave Kraft, scripter for the Defenders, hasn't treated Patsy nearly so well. At first he did pretty well by her, showing that her past was still painful when she said "I know what you're going through" to the Valkyrie after Jack Norriss had condemned her for betraying him to his enemies (*Defenders* #48). There was also an excellent interlude wherein Hellcat chides the Red

Guardian over Codename: Sergei, saying "I'm telling' ya, Tania, no fella is worth all the changes you've been through! I've been around. I know." Please note the grammar. It's also interesting to note that Tania succumbed to the Presence, while Patsy rejected her husband.

All through the Defenders, Dave Kraft has given Hellcat some moments of fair-to-good characterization. Recently, however, there has been a drastic lapse. Perhaps Dave wants to devote more time to action plotlines, or maybe he simply decided she wasn't worth his continued time and effort. In the past four months Patsy's character has slipped so far that she is now little more than a red-haired Boopsie in a cat costume. Hellcat could just as well have jumped off a cliff, because she's gone that far down, that fast.

It started slowly enough, with Hellcat calling her fellow Defenders "Hulky" and "Nighty" where formerly she had addresed them as "Hulk" and either "Nighthawk" or "Bluebird." These childish names are now practically a required part of her vocabulary.

The next step in the destruction of the Hellcat was to decide that she is a "crazy woman driver." In *Defenders* #59, Hellcat is shown "testing" Nighthawk's brand new, shiny, imported sports car, while he groans, "I can hear the gears grinding – feel the transmission twisting itself

into a pretzel – see the car *wrapped* around a fence post!" Not only does she drive like a mad woman, but it seems Patsy does it without a license, relying on her questionable Avengers Priority to protect her from a traffic ticket. In #59 Hellcat apparently asked Kyle's permission to drive "ol' Lola." Since then, however, she has stopped asking and simply takes the car whenever she pleases, as if it were her property. This is incredible. I'm rather surprised that our temperamental Mr Richmond hasn't bawled her out for her presumption, and forbidden her to use his car again. Frankly, I'm hoping he still will.

Both the maniacal, unlicensed driving and the insipid, childish nicknames were acceptable (the latter more than the former) as part of Patsy's light-headed personality. The real destruction of the Hellcat took place three months ago, with *Defenders* #62-64. To begin with, the Membership Madness trilogy was a total mistake no matter how you look at it. And after a year of reasonably good characterization, it was all the more sudden and shocking to see Patsy preening like a peacock and flirting with every strange male who came too close, as if she were in estrus. "Wow! I must've died and gone to hunk heaven! It's a dream come true! Which one do you want, Val?" "Just think, I've gone from former fashion model to instant TV superstar!" I think I'll be sick! Even if she was a model (its certainly possible) it was long ago enough to make her remark (and a similar comment of Nighthawk's) irrelevant. The fact that Hellcat is now a super-hero should out-weigh any fact about her past. Hellcat deserves much better than this.

As if it weren't bad enough that she's been turned so egotistical that the Hulk has to tell her, "Cat-girl is no burning light in the sky! Cat-girl is cat-girl." (*Defenders* #62), Patsy has suddenly changed from a woman bruised by her divorce to a drooling Boopsie who goes ga-ga over the guys. In *Defenders* #62, Hellcat won't speak to Torpedo after she finds out that he's married, and she flirts with the "hunks" so outrageously that she actually starts a fight between Captain Ultra (who?) and Jack of Hearts, and only a stampeding herd of horses prevents their coming to blows. Please note that Patsy flirts only with "hunks," never with men. Most of the men I know like being called a "hunk" like I like being called a "broad" – they don' like it.

Up until *Defenders* #64, Hellcat could take care of herself in battle. In fact, she's been fortunate, for a woman. She hasn't been held hostage once yet (knock on wood). And she's only been badly about three or four times, by Hyperion – predictably, in her first fight ever – by Orca, the Human Killer Whale, and by Leo, the Lion, of Scorpio's New Zodiac. In *Defenders* #64, however, Patsy gets strangled by the Blob, and she only survives by knocking out everyone in sight.

As the Valkyrie said to Lunatik, "This is the final indignity!" I suppose Dave Kraft will produce some super-villain out of his hat and say this villain is to blame. But until he does, even if he does, there will be no excuse for his intolerable lack of regard for the established dignity and intelligence of a young woman named Patsy Walker. Mr. Kraft must reconsider his portrayal of the Defender, Hellcat, and modify it — and puh-lease have her quit calling her teammates "Hulky" and "Nighty," before its too late to repair the damage and Patsy Walker irrevocably becomes another in a string of Marvel Boopsies. If he doesn't — well, you read the title.

P.S. I welcome suggestions, comments, and (not too much?) criticism from everyone out there. Please write to me at: Whitworth College, Spokane, WA 99251. — *Deby Dunn*

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Women in the Comics by Maurice Horn
Chelesea House Publishers, 1977, $15.00

Maurice Horn defines the idea behind his new book, *Women in the Comics*, as "a study of the image of woman as perceived through the comics, not an exhaustive inquiry into the medium's treatment of women and its effect on the culture at large (although these aspects are by necessity touched upon)." Touched upon is right. It's hard for me to perceive any great difference between "a study of the image of woman as perceived through the comics" and "an inquiry into the medium's treatment of women," but in practice, Horn uses this nonexistent distinction as an excuse for skimping on or omitting entirely any aspect of women in comics that doesn't particularly interest him.

Thus we have dozens of panels of female characters who appeared in comic strips like Burne Hogarth's "Drago" that literally lasted only a year or two, but are personal favorites of Horn's. The man does have pretty good taste – I would have liked to see more of Hogarth's "Witch Hazel" and Hershfield and McClure's "Vanilla and the Villains" myself. However, this hardly justifies Horn's including so many scenes from short-lived strips like these, and even panels of some of the many women who flitted briefly through the lives of such determinedly celibate types as Ben Casey and Doctor Kildare, while omitting to even mention all but a handful of superheroines. Is an unidentified woman from Warren Tufts' western strip "Lance," which appeared from 1955 to 1960, really more worthy of inclusion in a survey of women in comics than Black Widow, who actually had her own series in *Amazing Adventures* for a while? Why does the long defunct (though recently briefly resurrected) Batwoman rate a full page and her niece, the original Bat-Girl, who appeared in fewer storeis than the average superhero's girlfriend, another half page, while heroines like Black Canary, that longtime member of the JSA and JLA, languish in the well-populated limbo of The People Horn Forgot?

As for what Horn has to say about the few heroines from comic books, as opposed to his beloved newspaper strips, that he deigns to include, it's enough to make me think that I must know more about superhero comics than he does – and I've only been a fan for two and a half years. This is his summation of Supergirl: "Supergirl performed her amazing feats in the grim, self-righteous tradition of the Superman family. She also managed to keep romance out of her life in both her guises – she was, to put it succinctly, a super-square."

If there is one thing Supergirl has been noted for throughout most of her nineteen-year career, it is her tendency to have a new romance every issue. Possibly Horn is referring to the fact that these romances are usually short-lived, because the man in question turns out to be a villain or a robot or someone who's trying to discover Supergirl's secret identity or someone whom she can never marry because he lives in the 30th century. But if that's what he means, that's what he should say. It is certainly erroneous to imply that romance is entirely absent from the Girl of Steel's life – as erroneous as his further neglecting to mention that she is no longer a teenager, just as the current Batgirl is no longer merely "the librarian daughter of Gotham City police commissioner Gordon," but a duly elected member of Congress.

Despite Horn's apparent conviction that most of the more traditional superheroines at both Marvel and DC are too dull to even discuss, he is enthralled by Red Sonja and Vampirella, whom he refers to as "two of the most morbidly fascinating female creations (who) saw the light in comic book format."

Any "female creation" with anything the least bit "morbid" or perverse about her sexu-

ality assumes immense social significance for Horn. He includes three pages of art from four different pornographic stories by Guide ("The Story of O") Crepax, two of which are all but identical in content judging by the scenes shown here, and makes the following convoluted statement about Vampirella: "The Freudian implications of a young woman using feminine wiles to get her required allowance of blood from unsuspecting males is presumably not lost on the readers." I *think* he may be saying that Vampi embodies some men's fears that letting a woman get close to them means letting her sap their strength and even life, but for all I know that bit about "her required allowance of blood" could be a heavily-veiled reference to menstruation.

Even Mary-Jane, Buster Brown's demurely mischievous playmate in the turn of the century strip by Richard Felton Outcault, assumes erotic proportions in Horn's eyes. "Her angelic face hid a devilish mind, while the large ribbon in her hair and her black stockings contributed to her image as a precocious vamp — a role she filled with relish by letting her companion suffer punishment for their jointly-perpetrated pranks." My great-aunt wore black stockings and ribbons in her hair as a child — all little girls in the 1900's did — and I assure Horn that she was not a precocious vamp. In fact, she was a tomboy who played on the baseball team with the boys at teacher's college (she graduated at sixteen).

As for Mary-Jane's "devilish mind" and her and Buster's "jointly-perpetrated pranks," all the pranks in the scenes Horn reproduces seem to be Buster's idea, and the most devilish thing the alleged "ingenue perverse" is shown doing is laughing as a donkey knocks Buster down with a strategically-placed kick. Not exactly angelic behavior, but hardly worthy of the Lolita that Horn describes, either.

Real life women in comics hardly fare better in Horn's rather one-sided analysis. His introduction is a masterpiece of patronizing put-downs of the "women cartoonists and editors, . . . women historians, critics and scholars" that he claims the field cries out for. After magnanimously conceding that "the image of woman projected by the comics . . . was one created by men in order to satisfy specific male needs is of couse the most grievous, as well as the most valid, objection leveled at the medium by female critics," and demonstrating the truth of this by describing the ever-popular "good girl art" as "depicting women (usually in weird costumes) in situations of an undeniable sado-masochistic nature," Horn smilingly concludes, "It would be foolish to see in all this the evidence of a deliberate male conspiracy." Oh, you paranoid little libbers . . .

The point Horn seems to miss is that no feminist has ever said that there was a deliberate male conspiracy against women in comics. What they have said – and what Horn backhandedly admits in several other places in the book – is that sexist attitudes are so deeply ingrained in American culture that they are automatically reflected in the comics except on those rare occasions when the writers and artists make a conscious effort not to reflect the usual stereotypes, but to create female characters who are independent individuals.

When discussing the "sorry state of affairs" that women have never comprised more than five per cent of the total number of active cartoonists at any given time, Horn does no better. Here is his description of an incident at a symposium on cartoon and humor at the New School for Social Research in New York City:

. . . when the question of female underrepresentation in the cartoon field came up

the hall was alive with debate and invective. The art editor of one magazine bluntly stated that aspiring women cartoonists simply didn't cut the mustard, while a number of those same aspiring women cartoonists present in the room vehemently screamed discrimination, sexism and worse . . .

Horn's own reaction? "Hardly an enlightening exchange of opinions." Not a word of criticism of an art editor who could cavalierly dismiss all the aspiring cartoonists in question simply on the basis of sex. At least Horn does admit that "most editors discriminated against women in the past" and "there is little doubt that quite a few still do."

Horn then goes on to say that:

. . . while women should certainly be given the same chance as men in this field as well as any other . . . the mere presence of more women cartoonists would not, in my view, lead to any appreciable improvement in the image of women in the comics.

. . . the record does not look good. After all, woman cartoonists Gladys Parker was as guilty of perpetuating a female stereotype in her comic strip, "Flapper Fanny," as any of her male counterparts, while Dale Messick's Brenda Starr does not appear measurably more liberated than Stan Drake's Juliet Jones or Leonard Starr's Mary Perkins. On the other hand, the two women characters most widely respected by women, Sheena and Wonder Woman, have been created and nurtured exclusively by men.

In the first place, no one ever said that "the mere presence of more women cartoonists" would automatically improve the image of women in comics. It certainly couldn't hurt, however.

In the second place, Horn's criticisms of the "sexist" work of the few women cartoonists who did manage to make it is like criticizing women for not producing a female Shakespeare in an era when most women barely knew how to read. On the previous page of his own book, Horn quotes Dale Messick as saying, "It was always the same story. Editors couldn't believe I could draw because I was a woman." Does Horn really think that editors with attitudes like that would ever have given Messick work at all if her heroine had been noticeably liberated? It must have been hard enough simply getting a foothold as a female cartoonist, let alone revolutionizing the industry's attitude toward women by introducing startling new types of female characters.

Horn's naive assessment of why Messick and Parker's work displays no more feminist awareness than their male counterparts' reminds me of a comparison made by Alex Koehn in the fanzine *Seduction of the Innocent* #1:

It would be like Will Eisner hiring a black artist and then telling him that Ebony must *be drawn precisely* that *way. Then whenever Eisner was attacked for racism and perpetuating racist stereotypes, he'd just say something like, "But it's drawn by a black. It doesn't seem to bother him."*

It had better not, if he — or in this case she, the female cartoonists – wants to go on eating.

Horn himself gives women cartoonists somewhat less than equal treatment, reproducing only a few panels of their work and relagating most of them to a separate two-page listing in the back of the book. Even Trina Robbins ends up here, represented only by two small panels of "Panthea." Her fellow female underground cartoonist, Shary Flenniken, does make it into the main section (the very last page, to be exact), but so do Denis Kitchen's "Ingrid the Bitch" and a rather obscure-seeming character called Marion McKay from an underground funny animal strip by a Dutch artist named Evert Geradts.

The logic of this is utterly unintelligible. And if Horn really believes that Marie Severin *created* Doctor Strange, the Hulk, and Sub-Mariner, as the wording of his remarks in the two-page "women cartoonists" section suggests, why on earth does he point out that he neglected

to include an entry on her in his much-vaunted *World Encyclopedia of Comics* ("The most comprehensive book on the subject," it says on the jacket flap)?

Maurice Horn's *Women in the Comics* is utterly infuriating because of its many sins of both omission and commission of casually sexist generalizations. However, it is an invaluable source book, a place to go for a tantalizing glimpse of what you're looking for and a few ideas about where to look next. It does set women in comics in some sort of historical perspective, however sketchy and incomplete. And Horn's analyses of how and why the roles of women in comic strips changed with the times – or didn't change – are interesting and appear to be accurate, as far as they go.

If you're a dyed-in-the-wool heroine fanatic, buy this book. If your love for the few superheroines included here, and for women in comics in general, isn't great enough to make you shell out fifteen dollars for anything this far short of perfection, borrow it. - *Margaret O'Connell*

Hola #1, 2, and 3
(#1 & 2, $1.00; #3, $1.25 from Carol A. Strickland, 5316 Blue Water Place, Fayetteville, NC 28301)

This is a quaint little offset-printed 'zine that brings to mind the true and original fanzine, with loose leaf pages modestly stapled together and the book giving a feeling of fan comraderie – quite different from the near-slickness of THS and TA but not as bad as a dittoed ragzine.

Hola! endeavors to explore the world of Wonder Woman and other comics/TV characters. Because I don't read comics any more, I got totally lost in the articles, but Wonder Woman fans will find a wealth of information and speculation. Illustrations are taken from a wide variety of fan artists and will therefore be varied in style and quality.

My eyes were a bit offended by the smallness of the print and grayness of the layout in the first issue. This is the same problem that AFTA has . . . graphics is an important part of a fanzine's appeal, and if I can't see it, I won't read it. It has to look good. Experience teaches well, however, and subsequent issues of *Hola!* featured more illustrations and a smoother layout. The print is still too small, but bigger letters would mean more pages and more money, a factor so prevalent in fanzine production.

Before you think that *Hola!* is only for Wonder Woman fans, we should mention some other subjects that this 'zine has touched: Teen Titans, X-Men and villains, Spider-Woman, Lois Lane, Doom Patrol and Black Cat. There's much more.

What's the history of the Amazons? Why doesn't anyone recognize Diana Prince as Wonder Woman? Want to know more about Wonder Woman's powers and costume? These questions and more are answered in Hola's first three issues. *Hola!* is recommended for just about anyone in fandom who enjoys being a part of fandom (and keeps better up to date on comic book plots than I do). - *Nick Chinn*

Dear Staff and Readers,

Thank you all for your encouraging remarks on my artwork . . . I've been flattered beyond the call of duty. (And I *know* this is all a plot to keep me drawing for you, Steve!)

But let's hear a little criticism, huh? All this praise has swollen my ego enough to make me consider giving up my promising career of accountant and part-time garbage collector!

Thank you much, you're good people.

Lela Dowling
1122 Merrimac Dr.
Sunnyvale, CA 94087

Gee, and it took me so long to make up all those names and write all those comments . . . Oops!

But seriously, Lela does love to recieve your letters, but NO phone calls please. - SRJ

Gentlemen,

THS #14 was exceptional. The photo print of Pamela Sue Martin was a welcome addition. I hope you will seriously consider printing more photos regularly! Charlie's Angels would be one example.

Gerry Monaghan
Route 5, Box 125
Tupelo, MS 38801

We'll continue to publish photos when they are appropriate, but there are a lot of magazines on the market that publish photos just for the sake of publishing photos. - SRJ

Hi Steve,

Don't remember how much you know or knew about my current situation. But things are better now – I *have* a job, money coming in, a means to stay alive.

However – I still don't have a place to live, any privacy, or any free time. For the time being you can send me things through my old school box no., as I am being put up here. But it would be better to take me off the staff as of now – I won't be able to contribute on any regualr basis at all, and I'd feel crummy if my name was up on the list with all the folk who work long and hard to put out. Eventually I'll be able to reassume all my old responsibilities, but this is a big transition period for me, and all activities not associated with survival must go out the window.

Thanks. Will try to keep in touch.

Bob Rodi
34 Chatham Lane
Oak Brook, IL 60521

CLUB NEWS *(cont. from pg. 13)*

If you're still with me, I'd like to insert the fact that TA #8 was collated by Steve all by himself (that's better than 2800 pieces of paper to handle), and Adrienne Foster, publisher of *Princessions*, assisted Steve with the stapling and trimming. THS/UK #2 is still in production, and we'll get it going right after this issue. There is a possibility that there is an Art Auction list being sent out with this mailing . . . look it over – your generous bids help keep the club financially afloat and show our artists that you appreciate their efforts.

Room prohibits me from rambling on . . . so we'll see you all next time, okay?

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